

THE TRAINING NEEDS OF LEATHER TECHNICIANS TO
SUPPORT CORPORATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AT FELTEX
AUTOMOTIVE LEATHERS

By

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed:

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STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Business Administration

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Other sources are acknowledged giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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I would like to thank my research advisor Peter Raap for all his support, guidance, and patience throughout this dissertation. He has been inspirational during my graduate experience.

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Next, I would like to thank all my friends and my lecturers. Without their support, I could not have accomplished as much as I have.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to my wife. Without her love and continued support this dream would not have been achieved.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Sookraj.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the training needs of leather technicians with the aim of supporting corporate competitive advantage within their company. Identifying competencies is an essential first step towards developing a training programme and to support corporate competitive advantage. An increasing body of evidence has indicated the importance of utilising people as a competitive advantage, yet many present-day organisations are still persisting in their use of conventional approaches to strategy. Competency training will provide a framework for linking strategies to people and performance. This study was carried out at an automotive leather company. Due to the small population, a census was conducted and questionnaires were used to identify competencies. The sample (N = 34) represented 100% of the available population at the time of the study. The population consisted of managers and leather technicians who provided responses to the questionnaires. The study featured dichotomous questions to determine the levels of competency within the organisation. The researcher used statistical criteria (mean, mode and median) to identify the competency items. Data was examined and analysed using multiple statistical analysis, results were summarised and presented in tables and figures. The results of the study indicated that a training gap does exist in research management, communication skills, research environment and networking and team working.

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Chapter1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As companies face an environment of increased accountability, every organisation is sharpening its focus on how to succeed in today's changing environment (Stone 1997). Environmental changes are placing pressure on all organisations' competitiveness, and this, in turn, creates diverse challenges and problems. The only way to rise to the challenge is by allocating resources efficiently, developing competencies and capabilities, and exploiting competitive advantages that will enable the specific organisation to perform and deliver products and services better than its competitors. Competitive organisations possess capabilities that allow them to perform exceptionally well. If other organisations want to compete successfully, they will be forced to develop certain competencies. This is necessary because small organisations lack many of the economies of scale and scope that larger organisations possess.

According to Hamel and Prahalad (1996), the key to being productive in the future lies not in outdated management strategies, but rather in the area of strategic development and the application of an organisation's 'brain power' and 'intellectual capital'. In their view, an organisation's competitive strengths comprise the collective learning of its employees, particularly their ability to absorb knowledge and use it to the benefit of the core processes of an organisation. Consequently, the real

competitive advantage of the organisation is the collective knowledge and competency of its work force.

Chapter One will present a background to the study, outline primary objectives, make a statement of the research problem and give an overview of the remainder of the report.

1.2 Background

According to Gratton (2000), to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, organisations have to build on the potential of the people and there are three contributing factors that employees must bring to an organisation: their knowledge, their commitment and their enthusiasm to sustaining competitive advantage.

In a fast growing economy, where trade barriers are falling and competition is increasing, there is concern over whether many organisations have the ability to compete in the long term. In order for organisations to be successful and competitive, employees must be able to perform to the best of their ability. Competitive advantage for organisations in the old economy was measured by their financial capital and technology. The emerging economy insists that organisations invest in human capital, knowledge and skills (Gratton, 2000).

The importance of competitive advantage and distinctive competencies as determinants of organisations' success and growth has increased tremendously. Feltex Automotive Leathers (FAL) should recognise that achieving competitive advantage within its industry is the most challenging issue presently facing the company.

1.3 Problem Statement

In an increasingly competitive environment, FAL has to find ways to be a better company than its competitors. This should be achieved in ways that are difficult to copy, ensuring that it gains and sustains a competitive gap. The challenge is to identify how to improve and be different, so that the systems used by FAL cannot be imitated.

Training needs analysis, which has never been done at FAL, needs to be conducted to reveal competencies and to investigate ways to support corporate competitive advantage.

The research problem is firstly to identify whether a training gap exists amongst the leather technicians. Once this has been determined, suggestions will be made on how training can fill this gap, thereby supporting corporate competitive advantage.

1.4 Research objectives

The overall aim is to determine whether a training gap exists between the existing skills levels of leather technicians and the required levels necessary to support competitive advantage at FAL.

- The first objective is to identify the competitive competencies required by an organisation to be competitive.
- The second objective is to determine the required competencies of leather technicians.

- The third objective is to determine the current competencies of leather technicians.

1.5 Rationale for the study

A training needs analysis will help focus on the identification and prioritisation of training needs and contribute to formalising a training plan for leather technicians that will support FAL's corporate competitive advantage. The analysis will facilitate corporate development, and the improvement and implementation of a more structured training plan for leather technicians.

Apart from information collected from studies closely related to human resources development and training in other parts of the world, no literature on the training and development of leather technicians to support corporate competitive advantage is available in South Africa.

This study will outline the current and required competencies and will propose the improvements that can be made and additional training that should be implemented. The overall outcome will be that better trained leather technicians will be in a position to help FAL perform more effectively and efficiently. Leather technicians' development ought to allow them to obtain the knowledge and skills needed in a competitive environment, which comprises issues such as market complexity, technological advancements and research development activities.

1.6 Overview of Upcoming Chapters

Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five and Six will make up the balance of the research paper. What follows is a brief summary of each chapter and a description of their position in this study.

Chapters Two and Three both incorporate the review of relevant literature. The focus will be on previous research as well as on literature on competitive advantage and any writing, which identifies competitive competencies required by an organisation to be competitive. The discoveries within these two chapters will provide the foundation, which will further establish the necessity to pursue the research. In addition, it will serve as the historical background and point of reference for the reader.

Chapter Four deals with research methods. It describes the research methodology and design. It summarises the identification of the population, the data collection instrument, the data collection techniques, and the interpretation procedure.

Chapter Five discusses and analyses the details of the findings and interprets the results.

Chapter Six deals with the implications of the findings. It also makes recommendations. The paper ends with a conclusion on findings from the data analysis, and makes recommendations.

1.7 Conclusion

An introduction to this research study has been presented. The introduction, background and focus of the study have been described and the objectives have been presented. The next chapter will provide an overview of the concept that for organisations to be competitive, their long-term plan should include achieving a competitive advantage in the human resources skills of their company.

Chapter 2

Literature Review – Competitive Advantage

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter there will be a broad overview and an understanding that for organisations to be competitive, human resources is the long-term source of competitive advantage.

As rapid change and chaotic uncertainty become an essential part of doing business, any organisation that wants to survive and be competitive in the future, needs to be able to embrace the utilisation of its human resources as a competitive advantage (Gratton, 2000). Consequently, more organisations are finding that their long-term source of competitive advantage rests within their human capital (Heil, Bennis and Stephens, 2000).

2.2 Competitive Advantage

The concept of competitive advantage, which drives business strategy (Lado, Boyd and Wright, 2000), is about how organisations can out-perform their competitors in specific areas. Understanding how this is done has been the focus of many researchers in the field of strategic management (Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985). Lado, Boyd and Wright (2000) found two competing models. Others such as Reed and De Fillipi (1990) and Collins and Montgomery (1998) focus on the resource-based view.

The resource-based view focuses on certain competencies and capabilities of an organisation that are bundled and used to gain competitive advantage. There are focuses on specific resources that are used to gain competitive advantage, such as intellectual resources (Zack, 1999), distinctive competencies (Lado, Boyd and Wright, 2000) and human resources.

2.3 Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Sustainable competitive advantage is best achieved when a firm is able to prevent competition from firms that can easily duplicate its portfolio (Olsen and Roper, 1998). The core competencies and the capabilities that make up the portfolio must be inimitable to sustain a competitive advantage. It is in an organisation's best interest then to not only aim for competitive advantage, but also to seek ways to sustain it. Due to its definite contribution to sustainable competitive advantages and greater profitability, research in the area of sustainability in strategic management focuses on resources (Day, 1994).

2.3 People as a Competitive Advantage

As the complexity of the world and the accessibility of traditional sources of competitive advantage increases, the success of organisations becomes progressively more dependent upon the dynamics, knowledge, talents and energy of people (Frohman, 1997; Soliman and Spooner, 2000).

The term competitive advantage is used to describe all attributes and resources of an organisation that allows it to outperform others in the same industry or product market

(Chaharbaghi & Lynch, 1999). This finding is supported by Barney (1991), who proposed that resources must meet four criteria to be able to generate sustained competitive advantage: value, rarity, imperfect imitability, and non-substitutability.

According to Walker (1992), a competitive advantage is a fundamentally advantageous position from which to compete. It incorporates a success factor in the market, which is substantial enough to make a difference, and is sustainable in the face of changing conditions. This success factor is achieved by focusing on variables that differentiate organisations from their competitors (Walker, 1992). As a result, attaining a people-based competitive advantage requires a standard that clearly distinguishes organisations from their competitors.

Van Vuuren (1999) states that Jack Welch, a former chief executive officer of General Electric, agreed with the view that to uphold a company's competitive advantage, the competence of people in an organisation must be paramount.

Learning and practising resourceful competitiveness is a major issue in the 21st Century. Irrespective of the market in which an organisation wishes to compete, the future is unstable and challenging. An organisation aspiring to achieve success and leadership in potential markets must understand the accelerating pace that the world economy is currently facing. New products are speedily being designed and introduced into the market, with more emphasis on costs and lower price offers. The consequences, which affect employees, are cutbacks and unemployment. Additionally, the competitive phenomena that exist at local and global levels is a

situation that has always called for intervention by concerned members of the public, private sector, governments and researchers (Hamilton, 2002).

The new economy is moving away from being asset-intensive towards becoming knowledge-intensive. The focus is moving from the provision of material products to the provision of service products. Most organisations have access to the Internet and the latest technology. This access enables skilled personnel within the organisation to provide better competitive advantage, than both the products and process technology (Gratton, 2000).

However, Hamilton (2002) found that some businesses, although they had initially planned, had experience and were initially successful, were later in trouble when the environment changed. Competition increased and the industry, in which they existed, had changed. Many of these firms restructured, some survived, but most failed.

According to Brownstein (2001), the need for training and development in the future is imperative. Brownstein (2001) also mentions that for an organisation to retain its competitive status, engagement in skills development and knowledge elevation is compulsory. The advantage is that the organisation would be capable of coping with technological advancements and trade demands. This is a universal concern, and Cetron (1999) feels that most people in organisations will have to continuously learn new skills.

Cascio (1994) explains that training and development can be a major component in dealing with change and further says that at an organisational level, the training of

employees becomes the means to achieve change through adaptation rather than through revolution. The training of employees provides an organisation with a tool to adjust to environmental changes and to impart any new skills needed to make full use of new technology. By teaching employees specific skills related to the process of adaptation, organisations will find themselves becoming more adaptable.

Schneier, Guthrie and Olian (1994) state that limited or inadequate training needs assessment is carried out in most organisations and that the majority of organisations determine training and development needs reactively rather than proactively.

According to Gratton (2000), for competitive advantage to be achieved, employees' creativity, talent, inspirations, hopes, dreams and excitement should be the centre of focus. The organisations that flourish in this decade will do so because they are able to provide meaning and purpose, a context and frame that encourage individual potential to flourish and grow. To fulfil this role, organisations will need to assess their existing training and adjust it to competitive levels. Gratton further says that in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, organisations have to build their employees' potential, commitment and enthusiasm.

Financial capital brought competitive advantage in the last century, because it was a relatively scarce commodity. However, financial capital is no longer scarce and technology can easily be imitated (Gratton, 2000). Resources of capital and technology continue to bring advantage, but these unfortunately cannot be sustained. In this decade, only effective human resource can sustain the competitive advantage of organisations. This is because people potentially have three aspects that contribute

to sustainable advantage: the ability to create rarity, value and inimitability (Gratton, 2000).

Mondy, Noe and Premeauz (1999) state that continually upgrading the workforce's knowledge and skills has become increasingly important for global competitiveness. Predominantly, this is because new technology and new products can easily be copied within three to six months. The only ongoing competitive edge any company has is its workforce. The workforce, however, will not be competitive unless they are adequately trained.

According to Lee and Owens (2000), a needs assessment is the systematic process of determining goals, identifying discrepancies between actual and desired conditions, and establishing priorities for action. They further reported that an assessment is a way to collect information that can be used to decide what type of development will be perceived as relevant and useful. This, in turn, enables a conversation to take place that questions the type of skills and knowledge required by the organisation to make it more effective. Organisational gaps will be identified and measured in order to determine if the problem can be resolved through training.

From the above, it can be seen that an organisation creates a competitive edge by recognising that its human assets play a major role in sustaining its existence. This philosophy is not just assisting organisations to understand how to create a high performance culture, but is also directly influencing the fundamental source of potential competitive advantage –the organisation's human assets.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of competitive advantage and has shown that human resources can contribute to the company's competitive advantage. In addition, it was discussed that corporate competitive advantage can be sustained through assessments, training and development. The next chapter will focus on competencies that are required by organisations in order for them to be competitive which will support human resources to contribute to an organisational competitive advantage.

Chapter 3

Literature Review – Competencies

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will review competencies required by organisations for them to be competitive. Existing literature on the topic of competencies will increase our understanding and knowledge of this subject.

3.2 Competencies

According to Peppard and Ward (2004), competencies reflect a bundle of skills and technologies rather than a single, discrete skill or technology, while capabilities are the strategic application of competencies.

A review of the literature on competencies reveals a variety of definitions for competency. Carrolle and McCrakin, (1996) proposed that competencies are knowledge, skills, abilities, attitude traits or behaviours that characterise excellent performance within a specific job context. Stone (1997) describes competencies as the application of knowledge, technical skills and personal characteristics, which are designed around the skills of individuals. These are required to be effective in job performance and in making human resource decisions. Consequently, competencies are quickly becoming a mutual theme for many organisations. Competencies and individual competence are receiving recognition as an essential element for organisations.

Therefore, a competency is essentially any knowledge and skills that affect the major part of an individual's job that generally relates to his or her areas of responsibility.

The knowledge or skills can be improved through training and personal professional development activities. Rothwell and Benkowski's (2002) Five Stages is a process used to develop training programmes for professional development of individuals.

The five stages that are used to develop a training programme are, The Analysis Stage, The Design Stage, The Development Stage, The Implementation Stage, and The Evaluation Stage (Rothwell and Benkowski, 2002). The five stages starting with the Design Stage are as follows:

In the Design Stage learning objectives will be determined, both in terms of knowledge and performance. The objectives will be determined by using the competencies' requirements collected during the Analysis Stage to specify the knowledge, and skills, that will be provided in the training. It is important to identify how the employee will know if the objectives have been met and what measures will be used. Written statements will define exactly when, what, and how well the employee must perform during training. The trainer will test the individuals to ensure that the competencies are reliably evaluated, and the design process will be concluded when all the tools for the development of a training programme are defined.

During the Development Stage, the trainer will combine the knowledge and performance objectives, instructional materials, course design, and model from the design stage for employees to achieve learning objectives. During this stage, existing materials will be reviewed, lesson plans will be selected and new ones will be produced. In the review process, critical input is essential to ensure that the training

materials are clear, concise, and effective in addressing objectives. The objective will describe how the employee will perform during training to achieve the learning objectives. The results of the training materials will be reviewed for technical accuracy. They will be tested with a group of employees, and revised as necessary. The Development Stage will end when the validation demonstrates that the instruction meets the performance standards specified by the objectives.

The Implementation Stage is the process that cannot be taken for granted. This is when conditions are determined (who, what, when, where) under which the training will be offered and the solution implemented. Reviewing the data collected, and discussing the conditions of their job with employees will achieve the required training and solutions. The outcome of this step defines the guidance and support needed to ensure a successful training plan. Subsequently, the availability of employees, facilities, and resources will confirm the use to create the training programme schedule. Training will be delivered as planned, and individual's performances will be evaluated. The evaluations will serve to verify that the employees have achieved the learning objectives. This stage ends when management is prepared to carry out the tasks required to provide and support the employee to gain the required competencies.

The purpose of the Evaluation Stage is to enable the trainer to determine if the training methods and material were effective and successful as well as whether they accomplished the goals and objective that were established. Following, training the effectiveness of the training programme will need evaluating. To evaluate the programme effectively, data will be gathered from participants and the results will be

carefully analysed to identify any unforeseen problems or changing conditions. It is also essential to monitor the return on investment in the training programme and determine whether the required competencies have been achieved through training.

3.3 Literature on Competencies

An in-depth review of related literature of competencies revealed limited studies.

A study by the American Department of Labour and Education (SCANS Skills, 2000) formed the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to study the types of competencies and skills that workers must have to succeed in today's workplace. Workplace competencies were broken down into five areas: resources, information, interpersonal, systems and technology.

The topic of resources addressed time, money, materials, facility resources and human resources. Information looked at how to acquire, evaluate, organise, maintain, interpret and communicate information. The area referred to as interpersonal was about teamwork, service, leadership, negotiation, cultural diversity and helping others learn. Systems then focused on social organisational and technological work systems, monitoring and correcting performance within those systems as well as modifying existing systems or designing new ones. Technology delved into the selection, application and maintenance surrounding various machines, computers and other forms of technology (SCANS Skills, 2000). The foundation skills covered the topics of basic skills, thinking skills and personal qualities. The basic skills addressed reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, listening and speaking. Thinking skills covered creative thinking, decision-making, problem solving, seeing things in the

mind's eye, and knowing how to learn and reasoning. Finally, personal quality tackled responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self- managed integrity and honesty (SCANS Skills, 2000).

The study conducted by SCANS identified certain key competencies and skills required by employees to succeed in today's workplace.

Hamel and Prahalad (1996) argue that it is particularly important for an organisation concerned about its future success to be preventative in its development and alignment of competencies in order to lead the way in terms of new products and services. They state that to build the competencies of individuals for the future, the following seven leadership competencies should be developed:

- **Problem Solving** – The employee should be able to recognise problems and know what is necessary and whom to contact to resolve them. He/she troubleshoots to avoid encountering problems and takes the initiative to gather relevant information to solve those problems.
- **Coaching** – The employee is willing to help and/or instruct individuals on work activities. He/she openly communicates and shares knowledge with co-workers, and volunteers to train new employees on products, processes, system and/or functions.
- **Organisational Skills** – The employee is able to successfully organise his/her time to cope with multiple assignments and competing priorities. He/she meets production deadlines, must be able to shift back and forth from one process to another and is able to organise tasks to cope with crisis situations.

- **Team Goals** – The employee is able to focus on organisational goals and promote collaboration and teamwork as the preferred means to achieve those goals.
- **Personal-Interaction Skills** – The employee works well with others and is able to adapt to changing personnel. He/she is open-minded, gives thought to others' ideas and is able to compromise.
- **Verbal Communication** – The employee communicates complex issues in understandable terms, demonstrates an understanding of concepts, and is able to adapt messages to varying expertise levels.
- **Written Communication** – The employee provides well-organised, thorough and clearly written instructions. He/she uses appropriate terminology, grammar, and punctuation and clearly documents what had been accomplished.

The American Compensation Association (1996) conducted a major survey of 217 mid-to-large size organisations to determine competencies. The survey pointed to wide use of competencies. This survey found organisations using competencies for:

- Communicating valued behaviours and organisational culture (75% agreed competencies have a positive effect);
- Emphasising people (rather than job) capabilities as a way to gain competitive advantage (42% agreed); and
- Encouraging cross-functional and team behaviour (34% agreed).

This report showed that mid-to-large size organisations used competencies as a way to clarify what performance matters.

King and Safrit (1998) conducted a study of 100 extension agents in Ohio. The study reviewed competencies related to volunteer management and professional development opportunities over a 24-month period. The competencies were:

- Identification of volunteer opportunities;
- Selecting and recruiting;
- Orienting;
- Training;
- Utilising;
- Recognising; and
- Evaluating

The findings were that all of the mentioned above competencies were found to be ‘somewhat important’ or ‘very important’. The three most important competencies were - utilising, supervising and recognising volunteers.

Patterson, Crooks, and Lunyk (2002), who conducted a study amongst nurses, stated that developing and maintaining competencies requires life-long learning. They further said that in the field of nursing, the personnel working in the medical facility must possess competencies in critical thinking, physical assessment, psychomotor skills and the operation of patient care equipment. Having achieved these competencies, they are more likely to contribute to the medical facility’s future success.

Tanner (2001) pointed out that competency-based learning utilises a teaching and learning process that is individualised and emphasises what an individual must know and do. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organisations developed and mandated competency tools to support core competency learning and skills achievement (Tanner, 2001).

Johnson (2003) suggested that organisations should align their key individuals and workforce programmes with the organisation's overall strategy. It emerged in this study that middle manager competencies were a vital component in the successful alignment of workforce programmes and organisational performance goals. The author suggested that competencies could be organised into two areas: perceived and actual.

A study by Mayer (2003) examined whether health workforce competencies are predictive of essential service performance. He measured the relationship between self-assessed core competency levels and self-assessed service performance, defined as the frequency of performance of public health job tasks, at a US metropolitan health department. He found that an employee's competency level had only a very modest association with what are essentially service performance inputs.

Smith and Rutigliano (2003) provided evidence that different competencies predict performance across individuals in the same role. Surveys of top performing salespeople, assessed on measurable performance outputs such as sales results, show that most of them rate highly on only one or two generic sales competencies. These competencies are not the same for all successful salespeople. In fact, some successful

salespeople rated very poorly on certain sales competencies. This finding indicates that the use of simple models of generic/universal competencies across individuals and organisational units may severely limit the benefits to be gained.

The New Zealand States Services Commission (2002) reported that, in government departments, competency models were used for recruitment, performance management and the development of individuals and the organisation. Anticipated benefits were the establishment and communication of common standards to provide improved focus. In their sample, only 4 (25%) of the organisations with competency models actually referred to these competency definitions consistently in the recruitment and selection process. In most cases, competencies were so broadly defined that they could not be evaluated in the selection process. Despite all the research showing cognitive ability as an important predictor of overall job performance, in practice, most hiring decisions across all organisations are still based on informal, unstructured interviews, which is one of the least valid selection methods.

A survey by Chiabaru (2000) indicated that one of the key factors sustaining interest in competencies, as well as elsewhere, is the fact that, as the nature of work becomes more complex, skill requirements are overtaking the traditional distribution of ability in the workforce and creating a talent shortage. The survey canvassed opinions of senior executives, 80% of whom believed that the ability to attract, select and retain the best people would be the primary driver of business strategy by the end of this decade.

Collis and Montgomery (1998) emphasise that effective analysis of competencies requires support from organisational resources on a level that can reveal the competitive superiority that underlies their strategic value. In a realistic approach, competencies are the building blocks of organisational success.

Many professionals continue contributing to the field of competence research, linking competency-based human resource to an organisation's competitiveness. They described a key component of workforce planning as the gap analysis. An assessment of the ability of existing workforce competencies to meet future needs will create organisational success by the identification of competency gaps (Green, 1999; Lucia and Lepsinger, 1999; Stoof et al., 2002).

3.4 Core Competencies

Core competencies are different from competitive advantage. In essence, core competencies are what firms traditionally used to gain competitive advantage. They are the competencies that define a firm's business (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997), and are created by the organisation to drive it to be superior to its competitors (de Chabert, 1997).

Sustainability of competitive advantage depends on matching the organisation's capabilities (resources) with the firm's competencies (what the firm does best). Certain studies have focused on the firm's core competencies as capabilities, seeking to identify the abilities within an industry or organisation that offer competitive advantage (Olsen and Roper, 1998).

Campbell, Stonehouse and Houston (1999) described competencies as the attributes such as skills, knowledge, technology and relationships that are common among industry competitors. Core competencies, on the other hand, are based on the unique way that the firm builds, develops, integrates and deploys its resources and competencies. Core competencies add value to a firm and are usually possessed by organisations whose performance is above industry average. They are based on skills and knowledge that are unique to the firm. These need to be sustained over time, as they do not last indefinitely (Campbell, Stonehouse and Huston, 1999).

Ravichandran and Lertwongsatien (2005) argued that firms could perform better if their capabilities (resources) supported the firm's core competencies. They focused on three types of organisational core competencies: market access, integrity, and functionality. Their research model consisted of four major components: information technology resources, information systems capabilities, information technology support for core competencies, and firm performance. The data collected supported the research model that capabilities (resources) will help a firm's ability to enhance its core competencies.

Peppard and Ward (2004) conducted a study by collecting data using multiple interviews within nine manufacturing firms. The data were analysed using the framework of 26 information systems competencies. The analysis showed that small to medium enterprises could develop information systems competencies, and an organisational capability (resources) to be used strategically to exploit its benefits. The finding was that some firms had developed significantly more competencies than

others and the case study evidence indicated a correlation between the number of competencies and the level of success.

Coyne, Hall and Clifford (1997) argued that most firms state that they have competencies but in reality they do not. Therefore, they suggest that they should begin to define their competencies and test to see if they are valuable, and then develop the ones that are valuable. It was suggested that when evaluating competencies, factors such as employee skills and the generation of value should be considered.

3.5 Overview of the company under study

The company under study is a supplier of upholstery leather to the automotive industry, both local and international manufacturers. The company has been supplying the automotive industry for the last 16 years and operates from a manufacturing facility situated in Ladysmith, South Africa. The company employs 450 personnel and draws its workforce from the residential areas in and around the town.

Severe budget cuts and downsizing have had a tremendous impact on FAL. The resulting turnover and retrenching of personnel means that the organisation will be required to be more efficient and effective in carrying out its mission. Based on this challenge, the organisation needs to look for ways to focus on certain key competencies that will enhance their leather technicians' job performance. Even with a smaller staff, the issue of competency development is increasingly important. The question that the organisation faces is whether there are competencies that would help leather technicians with their professional development and what the competencies

are that will support the company competitive advantage. To identify those competencies and how they may impact on knowledge in one's job will aid the company's survival and achieve competitive advantage.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented competencies and core competencies, which is the backbone of development in organisations in business today. It further highlighted that organisational competencies (resources) will assist to achieve competitive advantage. Competencies are a requirement for the future world of work and organisations are dependent on those competencies to enable it to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. In order to ensure the competency and readiness of individuals, ongoing training should be part of the business strategy. Training should be guided by mission goals and should be constantly measured to ensure that individuals are competent.

This chapter provides the context of the study within which the chapters that follow should be viewed. The following chapter will present the methodology of the study, which was carried out at the company.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined competencies, and the required competencies, which will allow the organisation to be competitive. This chapter will describe the methodology taken by the researcher and the following chapter will provide the analysis.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Research Approach

This study was conducted at FAL in South Africa. The literature study was used to attain and provide a pre-understanding and knowledge within the research topic. A census was carried out targeting certain competencies, focusing primarily on the leather technicians within the company. In this study, literature studies and questionnaires were used to gather information, which comprised of:

- A review of literature identifying competitive competencies required by an organisation to be competitive.
- Questionnaires completed by managers and administered at FAL. The objective was to identify the required competencies of leather technicians.
- Questionnaires completed by leather technicians and administered at FAL. The objective was to identify the current competencies of leather technicians.

This approach is a quantitative descriptive study based on a self-completion questionnaire.

4.2.1.1 Census

Welman and Kruger (2003) state that in a census, each member of the population is included. A census was conducted at FAL because of the small population. All 19 managers and 15 leather technicians were included in the survey.

4.3 Research Instrument

Self-completion questionnaires were used as a method of gathering data from managers and leather technicians at FAL.

4.3.1 Design of the data collection instrument

4.3.1.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaires consisted of structured closed-ended questions. The questions were pre-determined and the respondents were requested to indicate their responses by circling the numbered response for each question. The response option was dichotomous rather than multiple choices. The use of dichotomous responses gave the researcher a clear understanding of leather technicians' and managers' perceptions of their level of competencies. The questionnaire was adapted from an existing questionnaire held by the training officer at FAL. The changes made to it are outlined below.

4.3.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire was handed to the respondents with a covering letter and a date for return. The researcher contacted the training officer at FAL to ensure co-operation regarding the return of the questionnaires.

4.3.3 Permission to conduct research

Permission was granted by the HR Manager at FAL.

4.3.4 Pilot test

The training officer at FAL, who is a key decision-maker in training, confirmed that the questionnaire was acceptable. This acceptance suggests face and content validity. The training officer administered the questionnaires of the pilot study. People familiar with the industry took part in the pilot study. The time it took to complete each questionnaire was measured. The respondents were debriefed after they had completed the questionnaire. The responses were analysed and questions that did not provide useful data were discarded before the final revision of the questionnaire was made.

4.3.5 Coding

Coding is the process of converting questionnaire data into meaningful categories to facilitate analysis. A coding scheme was built into the questionnaire in the study. Circling the numbered response for each question allowed the researcher to enter data

directly from the questionnaire into a database for analysis. The numbers corresponded to the variables in the database where the responses will be stored.

4.3.6 Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed and interpreted by using an appropriate statistical package and appropriate statistical measures.

4.3.7 Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the consistency of the data and validity refers to the accuracy of the data (Fox, 1998; Grinnell and Williams 1990). Such conditions must hold for any data recorded through any data collection method. The degree of accuracy to which a research instrument measures the context will improve the credibility of the instrument and the usefulness of the research. The research instrument was scrutinised by training experts at FAL. The validity in this research was enhanced through the data collection methods.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodology used for this research. The purpose of this chapter was to review the method of research and the fundamental principles of questionnaire design.

The data analysis will follow in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

A quantitative descriptive approach was used in this study. This approach was designed to uncover the meaning attached to the topic of study. Census was used as the data collection technique. Managers and leather technicians were asked to respond to questions determining their level of competencies. The questions were designed to identify both the required and the current state of competencies.

5.2 Data Analysis

A Microsoft database was developed for the purpose of data entry and analysis. The data was analysed to identify the required competencies for leather technicians, and to identify their current competencies. The data was intended to allow an analysis of comparison between the perspectives of leather technicians and their managers regarding the relative importance of the validated level of competencies. Such a data analysis would contribute to an understanding of the real and the perceived training gap. Descriptive statistics were generated for each skill and utilised for the analysis. As the data analysis illustrates, there was representation from each target population to justify sound comparisons. The data was analysed and interpreted by the researcher. Each skill was reviewed separately to achieve an individual rating based on the data.

5.3 Personal Demographics

This section will be an overview of the personal data of the respondents.

Of the 34 individuals in the population, there was 100% response rate. These respondents represented the overall study population. The respondents were the managers and leather technicians employed at FAL.

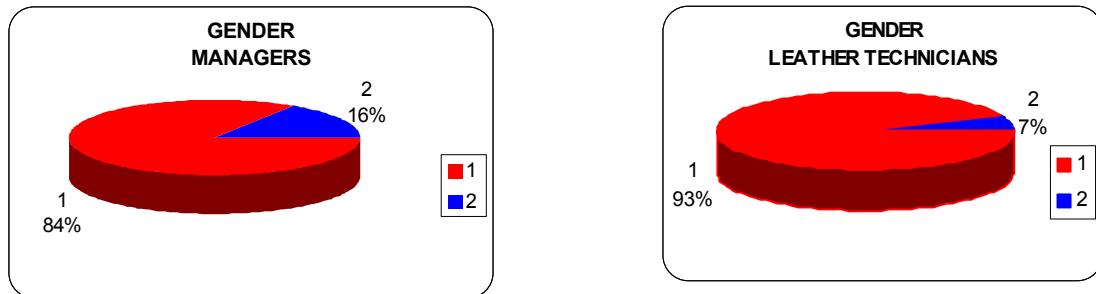
5.4 Profile of the Respondents

Included in this section are the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, department, and job category. Organisational factors included years of experience. The competency dimensions for this study were research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and team working and career management. Respondents were asked for their perceptions of each of the seven competency dimensions.

5.4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographics are presented by using Figures. The Figures below show the number of cases as a percentage.

Figures 5.1 Gender



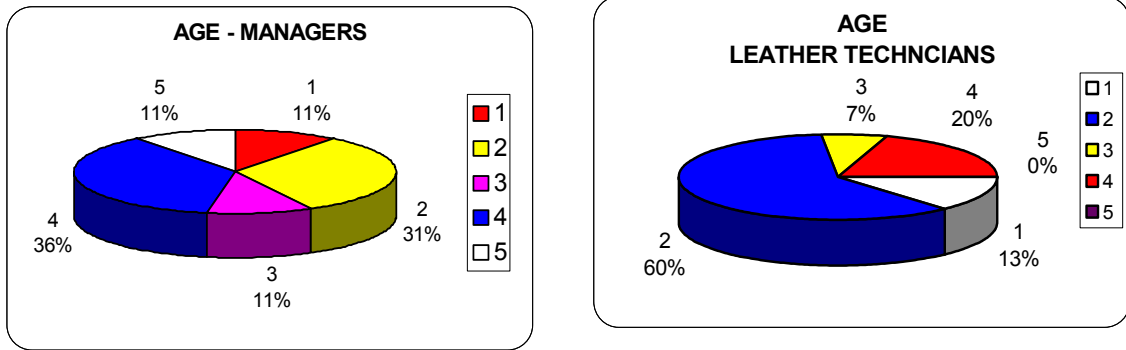
In the above Figures, the value of 1 represents male and 2 represents female. The figures highlight the percentage of males to females for managers and leather technicians. The figures show that the majority of respondents were males in both managers and leather technicians' categories.

Table 5.1 Gender – Male and female distribution

Number	Number of Managers	Percentage	Number of Leather Technicians	Percentage
1 (Male)	16	84.21	14	93.33
2 (Female)	3	15.79	1	6.67
Total	19	100	15	100

The above table shows that respondents were made up of 16 male managers and 14 male leather technicians and 3 female managers and 1 female leather technician.

Figures 5.2 Age groups



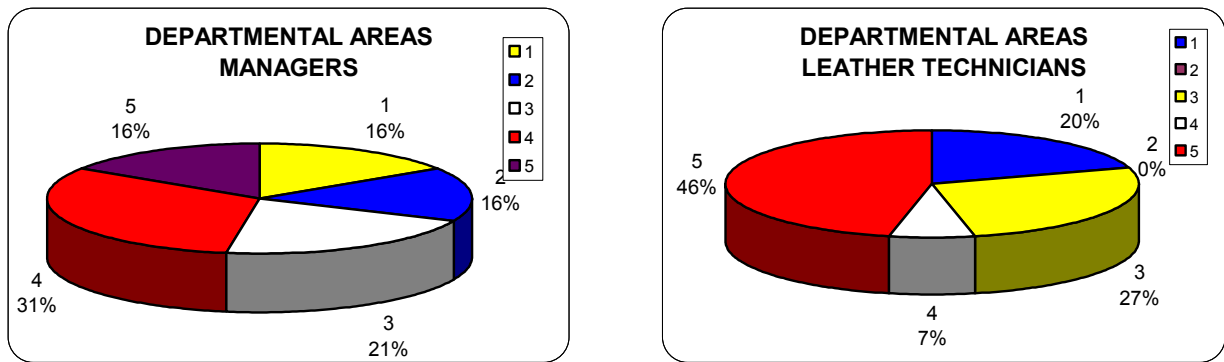
The figures represent the percentage of five age categories. Number 1 represents 25-30 years old, 2 represents 31-35 years old, 3 represents 36-40 years old, 4 represents 41-50 years old, and 5 represents 50+ years old. It is clearly indicated that the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 31-35 for leather technicians and between 41-50 for managers.

Table 5.2 Age group distribution

Number	Number of Managers	Percentage	Number of Leather Technicians	Percentage
1	2	10.53	2	13.33
2	6	31.58	9	60.00
3	2	10.53	1	6.67
4	7	36.83	3	20.00
5	2	10.53	0	0
Total	19	100	15	100

The age of the respondents ranged from 25 to 50+. There were two managers and two leather technicians who were between the ages of 25-30 years. Fifteen (6 managers and 9 leather technicians) respondents were between the ages of 31-35 years. Three respondents (2 managers, 1 leather technician) were in the age range between 36 and 40 years of age. There were ten respondents (7 managers, 3 leather technicians) aged between 41 and 50. Two managers were 50+.

Figures 5.3 Departments in which employees work



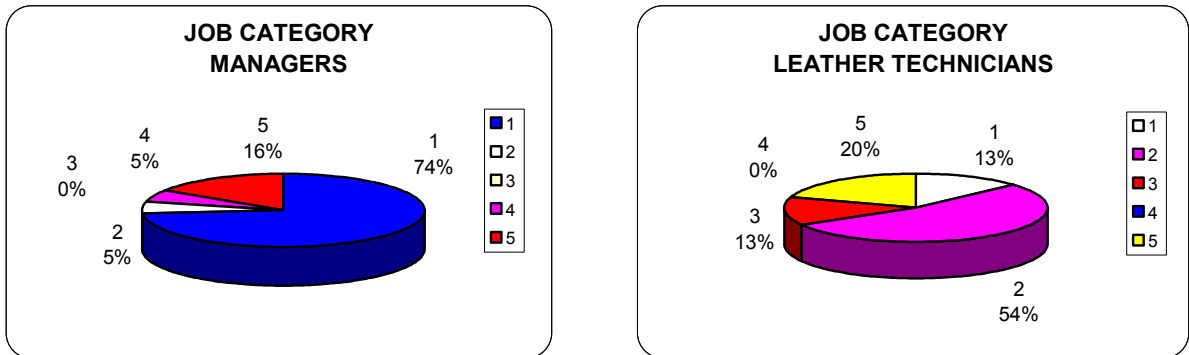
There are five department categories. Number 1 represents the Retan Department, 2 represents the Cutting Department, 3 represents the Finishing Department, 4 represents the Marketing Department and 5 represents R&D Department. The above Figures show clearly that a greater percentage of manager respondents are from the marketing department while most of the leather technicians are from the R&D Department.

Table 5.3 Department distribution

Number	Number of Managers	Percentage	Number of Leather Technicians	Percentage
1	3	15.79	3	20.00
2	3	15.79	0	0
3	4	21.05	4	26.67
4	6	31.58	1	6.67
5	3	15.79	7	46.67
Total	19	100	15	100

Six respondents (3 managers, 3 leather technicians) work in the Retan department, three managers work in the Cutting department, eight respondents (4 managers, 4 leather technicians) in Finishing, seven (6 managers, 1 leather technician) in Marketing and ten (3 managers, 7 leather technicians) in the Research and Development department.

Figures 5.4 Job category



There are five job categories. Number 1 represents management, 2 represents leather technician, 3 represents technical, 4 represents administrative support, and 5 represents foremen. The above figures show that a large percentage of respondents are on management level for managers.

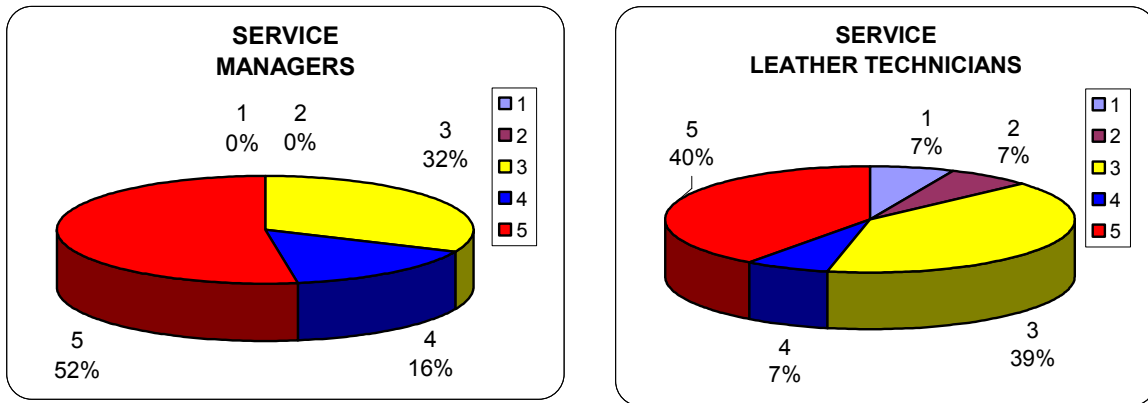
Table 5.4 Job Category distributions

Number	Number of Managers	Percentage	Number of Leather Technicians	Percentage
1	14	73.68	2	13.33
2	1	5.26	8	53.33
3	0	0	2	13.33
4	1	5.26	0	0
5	3	15.79	3	20.00
Total	19	100	15	100

The number of employees at management level for both Managers and Leather Technicians' totalled sixteen (14 managers, 2 leather technicians). Nine (1 manager, 8 leather technicians) employees were leather technicians. There were two leather technicians who were classified as technical, one manager who was employed in administration support, and six (3 managers, and 3 leather technicians) were foremen.

5.4.2 Organisational factors

Figures 5.5 Years of service



There are five service categories, 1 represents 3 months – 1 year, 2 represents 1-3 years, 3 represents 4-6 years, 4 represents 7-10 years, and 5 represents 10 years plus. The above figures show that a large percentage of respondents have worked at the company for more than 10 years in both Managers and Leather Technicians categories.

Table 5.5 Years of Service distribution

Number	Number of Managers	Percentage	Number of Leather Technicians	Percentage
1	0	0	1	6.67
2	0	0	1	6.67
3	6	31.58	6	40.00
4	3	15.79	1	6.67
5	10	52.63	6	40.00
Total	19	100	15	100

Years of experience in FAL were tabulated in five groups. The largest group with respect to service were the 10 managers and 6 leather technicians who had worked for FAL for more than ten years. Respondents with 7 to 10 years of service comprised four (3 managers, and 1 leather technician) individuals. Twelve employees

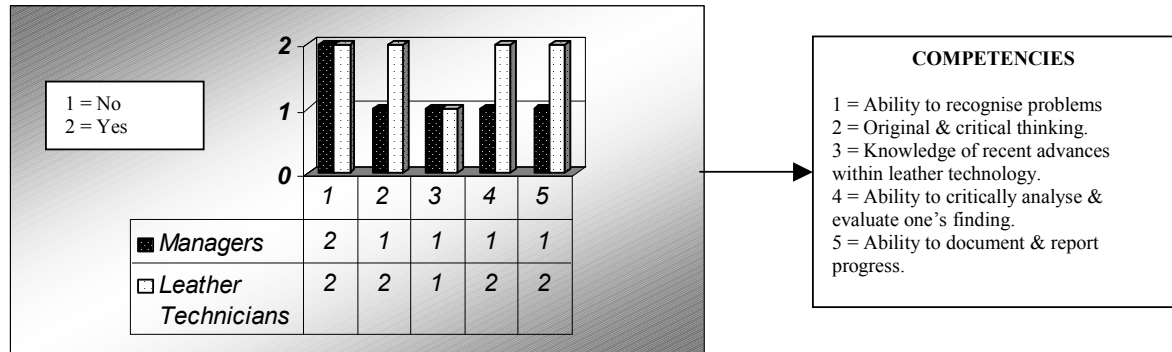
(6 managers, 6 leather technicians) had worked at FAL for between three and six years. One leather technician had worked for between one to three years. Finally, one leather technician had worked for three months to a year.

5.5 Descriptive Analysis of Summated Scale Questions

The data from the competency dimensions were entered in seven classification categories around which the data recovery instrument was designed. Arithmetic means, mode and median were computed for 32 competency items in the questionnaire. Statistical extraction was then completed for the questions within the categories. Each of the questions ascertained the level of competency within these groups: research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and team working and career management. The responses ranged from 1 (No) to 2 (Yes). Next, the results were evaluated, correlated with the research objectives, and interpreted in this chapter.

5.5.1 Research skills and techniques

Figure 5.6 Research skills and Techniques



Competency 1 indicates that both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that leather technicians are currently competent in this area.

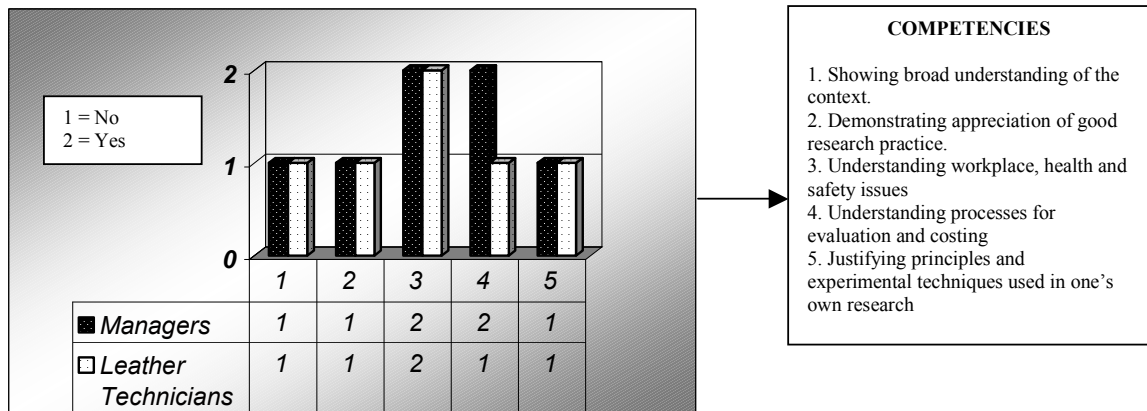
Competencies 2, 4, and 5 show a gap of perception. The manager's responses indicated that they are not a current competency while leather technicians responded that they are current competencies.

For Competency 3, both manager's and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that Competency 3 is not a current competency therefore presenting a training gap. Competencies 2, 4, and 5 have showed a perception gap of competency opinions of both manager's and leather technicians. Competency 1 indicated that leather technicians are competent and fulfil the manager's expectations.

5.5.2 Research Environment

Figure 5.7 Research Environment



For Competencies 1,2 and 5, both manager's and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

Competency 3 indicates that both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that leather technicians are competent.

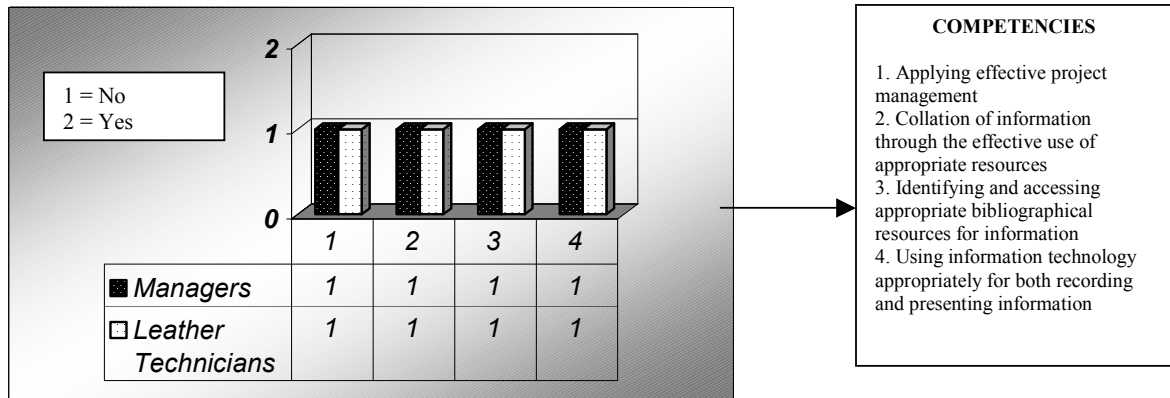
Competency 4 shows a gap of perception. The manager's responses indicated that the leather technicians are competent while leather technicians responded that they are incompetent in that area.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that competencies 1, 2, and 5 are not current competencies. Therefore, they present a training gap. Competency 4 showed a perception gap of competency opinions between managers and leather technicians.

Competency 3 indicated that leather technicians are competent and fulfil the manager's expectations.

5.5.3 Research Management

Figure 5.8 Research Management

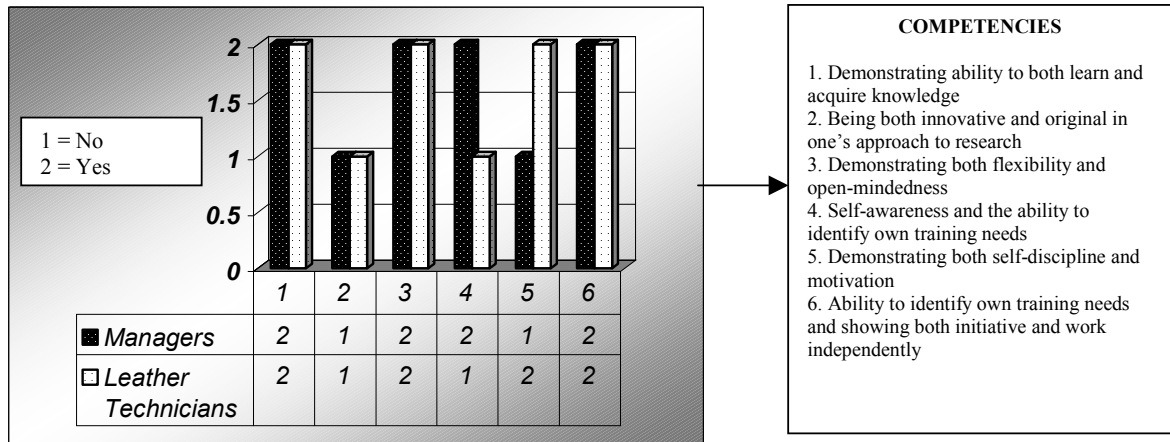


For Competencies 1, 2, 3 and 4, both manager's and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

Manager's and leather technicians indicated that competencies 1, 2, 3 and 4 are not current competencies therefore presenting a training gap.

5.5.4 Personal Effectiveness

Figure 5.9 Personal Effectiveness



- COMPETENCIES**
1. Demonstrating ability to both learn and acquire knowledge
 2. Being both innovative and original in one's approach to research
 3. Demonstrating both flexibility and open-mindedness
 4. Self-awareness and the ability to identify own training needs
 5. Demonstrating both self-discipline and motivation
 6. Ability to identify own training needs and showing both initiative and work independently

Competencies 1, 3 and 6 indicate that both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that leather technicians are competent.

For Competency 2, both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

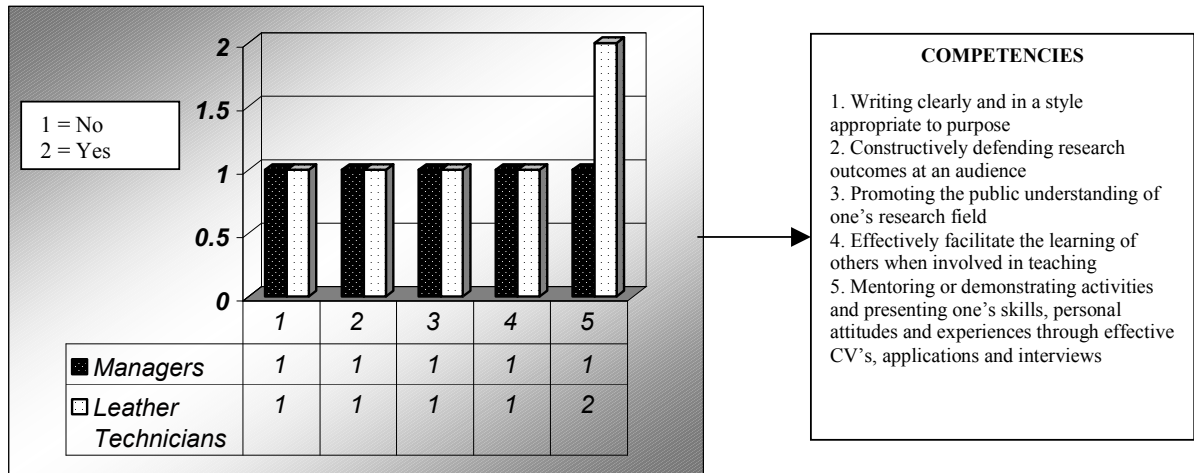
Competencies 4 and 5 show a gap of perception. The manager's responses to Competency 4 indicate that leather technicians are competent while leather technicians responded that they are incompetent in that area. For Competency 5, the manager's responses indicated that it is not a currently competency, while leather technicians responded that it is a current competency.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that Competency 2 is not a current competency. Therefore, it presents a training gap. Competencies 4 and 5 showed a perception gap of competency opinions of both manager's and leather technicians.

Competencies 1, 3 and 6 indicated that leather technicians are competent and fulfil the manager's expectations.

5.5.5 Communication skills

Figure 5.10 Communication Skills



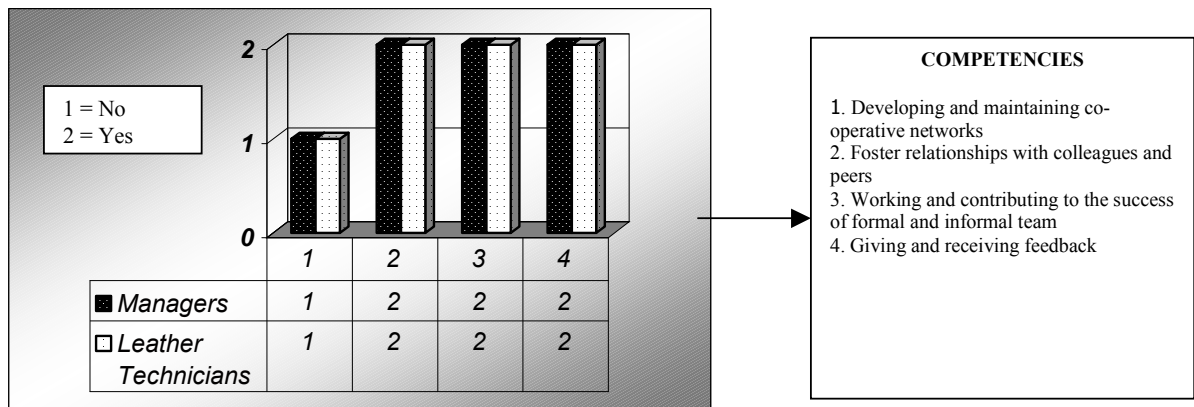
For Competencies 1, 2, 3, and 4, both manager's and leather technicians have the same opinion that they are not current competencies.

Competency 5 shows a gap of perception. The manager's responses indicated that it is not a current competency while leather technicians responded that it is a current competency.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that competencies 1, 2, 3 and 4 are not current competencies. Therefore, they present a training gap. Competency 5 showed a perception gap between the competency opinions of both managers and leather technicians.

5.5.6 Networking and Team-work

Figure 5.11 Networking and Team-work



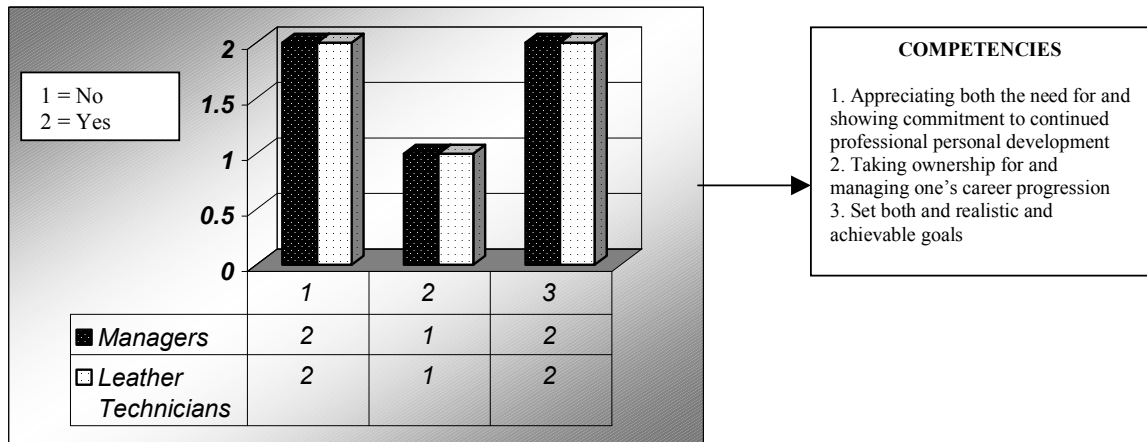
For Competency 1, both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

Competencies 2, 3 and 4 indicate that both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that leather technicians are currently competent in those areas.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that Competency 1 is not a current competency. Therefore, it presents a training gap. Competencies 2, 3 and 4 indicated that leather technicians are competent and fulfil the manager's expectations.

5.5.7 Career Management

Figure 5.12 Career Management



Competencies 1 and 3 indicate that both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that leather technicians are currently competent in those areas.

For Competency 2, both managers and leather technicians have the same opinion that it is not a current competency.

Managers and leather technicians indicated that Competency 2 is not a current competency. Therefore, it presents a training gap. Competencies 1 and 3 indicated that leather technicians are competent and fulfil the manager's expectations.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis stage in which the data was analysed to identify whether or not competencies were current. The findings of this chapter have presented a training gap within certain competency dimensions. There was also an agreement that a number of competencies fulfilled manager's expectations and a perception gap of competencies opinions between managers and leather technicians was identified.

Chapter Six discusses conclusions, implications and recommendations based on the findings.

Chapter 6

Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The six chapters leading to discovery started with an introduction of the central problem in Chapter One, and its significance as a research problem. The literature review in Chapter Two and Three built a foundation of understanding for the research. Chapter Four outlined the research design, data sources, collection techniques, and methodology. Chapter Five analysed the quantitative data and interpreted the findings. This chapter will provide the implications of the research, will make recommendations for further research and present a conclusion.

6.2 Implications

The implications are directed at the leather technicians at FAL. The implications may contain value for leather technicians and serve as a validation of competencies.

The following were considered to be the most significant implications.

Implication 1: This study has implications for leather technicians. For example, it supports staff qualifications and resource utilisation to enable employees to develop and use their full potential to support the organisation's objectives, and create a work climate that is conducive to performance excellence, full participation and organisational growth.

Implication 2: This study has implications for new employee selection. It may provide a clearer picture of the job requirements, increase the likelihood of hiring people who will succeed in the job, minimise the investment in people who may not meet FAL's expectations, ensure a more systematic interview process, and help distinguish between competency items that are trainable and those that are more difficult to develop.

Implication 3: This study has implications for training and development. It may enable FAL's management to focus on the competency items that have the most impact on performance on the job which is influenced by knowledge abilities, aptitudes, work styles, personality, principles, values, attitudes, and leadership styles, ensuring that professional development opportunities are aligned with organisational values and strategies. This will make the most effective use of training and development time, and provide a framework for ongoing assessment and evaluation.

Implication 4: This study has implications for employee performance evaluation. It may provide a shared understanding of what will be monitored and measured, focus and facilitate FAL's interim and annual performance appraisal discussions, and provide focus for gaining information about leather technicians' behaviour and performance on the job.

Implication 5: Leather technicians must pay attention to seven dimensions of competencies, which are research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and team working and career management in their work. These competencies are all functions of the leather technician's role. Training could be offered which could be made available for leathers technicians at all levels of experience. As confirmed by the study, leather technicians must gain the necessary competencies and skills in order to be successful. As the study has indicated, leather technicians lack certain competencies that are important and they will want to know about them and use them.

Implication 6: Knowledge of competencies must be viewed as an opportunity for continuing education since leather technicians have some knowledge of the competencies, the company must be willing to expand on that knowledge in order to ensure personal and organisational growth. Knowledge of competencies can first be improved by identifying individuals with relevant knowledge or expertise. These individuals may be peers, as well as individuals within the organisation. A determination of the relative priority of competencies may be considered as a foundation for possible competency development.

Implication 7: Since competencies are important, leather technicians must consider them an essential part of their personal development and strive to be skilled in the seven competency areas. In order for leather technicians to become skilled, leaders of the organisation must be willing to implement competency initiatives regardless of economic conditions, governmental policies or technological changes. Even though

external and internal constraints may exist, stakeholders must be willing to establish the conditions for performance standards in the seven competency areas.

Implication 8: If leather technicians are to be successful, they must practice competency use in their work. FAL must take a system's approach to improving individual and organisational performance. The concept of practicing competency use may be achieved through personal growth programmes. Personal growth programmes are designed to improve self-awareness and overcome inner barriers for growth and development of competencies.

Implication 9: FAL must continue to emphasise the value of continuing education. Since higher education does improve the competency knowledge base, formal and informal training is essential for FAL. The amount of continuing education training on competencies depends in part on prevailing attitudes and values about competency development or the 'organisational climate' for learning. Continuing education is more likely to occur when individual learning is regarded as highly important for organisational effectiveness. When this occurs, more resources will be dedicated to training and more effort will be made to explicitly measure and reward such training.

Implication 10: As the organisation experiences smaller staff numbers and down sizing, competency development will remain critical. During the changing process, the new strategy requires changes in the organisation's structure to bring it in line with the strategy. These changes must be implemented by involving leather technicians from all levels of FAL. If involvement does not occur from all levels, the change is less likely to be adopted.

6.3 Recommendations For Future Studies

The results of this study have stimulated ideas that should provide a basis for additional research. These recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

- 1) Assessments should be carried out on those competencies, which showed perception gaps.

- 2) The study should be replicated to provide a strong case for competencies in other jobs within FAL. The findings could then be compared with the findings of the present study.

- 3) The study should be replicated with other job groups with different roles, which could aid in staff development.

- 4) Based on the findings, it is suggested that a competency model based on specified functions of a potential job within FAL should be developed to use as a tool when hiring new staff. Competency training could be part of a new leather technician's orientation and training. All sub-competency training and development in competency areas would better prepare technicians for their roles at FAL.

6.4 Conclusions

Based on the review of the literature and the findings of this study, the following conclusions are presented,

Competitive advantage studies have shown that human resources can contribute to the company's competitive advantage. In addition, it was discussed that corporate competitive advantage can be sustained through assessments, training and development. The focus on competencies by organisations in order for them to be competitive will support human resources to contribute to an organisational competitive advantage. Competencies are the backbone of development in organisations in business today. It further highlights that organisational competencies (resources) will assist in achieving competitive advantage. Competencies are a requirement for the future world of work and organisations are dependent on those competencies to enable them to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. In order to ensure competency and readiness for individuals, ongoing training should be part of the business strategy. Training should be guided by mission goals and should be constantly measured to ensure that individuals are competent.

The findings in Chapter Five have indicated the respondents' current and required level of competencies. The analysis of the data in the existing database indicated that the managers identified the required competencies and leather technicians have indicated whether they are competent or not. Training gaps has been identified though the data analysis of the questionnaires in the following competency dimensions:

research environment, research management, and communication skills. There were also specific competencies within research techniques, personal effectiveness, networking and team working and career management, in which leather technicians were found to be incompetent. In addition, there were competency gaps within the competencies dimensions, which need further assessment to reach a final conclusion.

A training gap has been identified and the causes have been determined. Appropriate training programmes can now be designed and developed. Once a training programme is implemented, a desired outcome can be achieved. According to Rothwell (1996), training and development are essential to organisations, which seek to gain a competitive advantage through a highly skilled and flexible workforce, and are seen as a contributing factor to high productivity and quality performance. Skilled individuals will be able to increase productivity by producing at a higher level. They will also improve the organisation's operative flexibility and as a result staff will be easier to retrain due to their broad knowledge base of multi-skills.

The proper validations of the list of competencies and skills have served a dual purpose. The results have drawn the attention of the managers and leather technicians to the desirability and economic value of undertaking more training. A thoroughly validated list of competencies and skills would provide feedback to the training institutions with training programmes in place. Additional training programmes, both degree and non-degree, are also needed to provide leather technicians with higher levels of knowledge for addressing the competitive challenges at FAL. The use of Rothwell and Benkowski's (2002) five stages to develop a training programme for leather technicians will be a step forward in achieving the desired outcome.

One last thought would be to promote rather than enforce training. There are eager individuals within the organisation with the desire for personal growth. This training movement will have a longer lasting effect if the approach is done carefully and with the support of the staff.

This final chapter has reflected on the contribution of this research and the opportunities for further research that it has generated. The conclusion and recommendations were based on the objectives of the study. The theory implies that organisations that identify opportunities that exist in the environment should develop strategies to take advantage of these opportunities and allocate human resources to those opportunities, which will generate the greatest value in terms of competitive advantage (Olsen and Zhao, 2000).

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Appendix 1

This questionnaire is designed for Leather Technicians at Feltex Automotive Leathers.

This questionnaire is designed to find out a few things about yourself and your occupation. Please answer the questions truthfully.

(Please circle in the relevant number)

PERSONAL DATA

1. What is your gender?
 - Male 1
 - Female 2

2. To which of following Age groups do you belong?
 - 25-30 1
 - 31-35 2
 - 36-40 3
 - 41-50 4
 - 50+ 5

3. Which of the following describes the department in which you work?
 - Retan 1
 - Cutting 2
 - Finishing 3
 - Marketing 4
 - R&D 5

4. Which of following BEST describes your job category?
 - Management 1
 - Leather Technician 2
 - Technical (hourly) 3
 - Administrative Support 4
 - Foreman 5

5. How long have you worked for this present establishment?
 - 3 months - 1 year 1
 - 1 - 3 years 2
 - 4 - 6 years 3
 - 7 - 10 years 4
 - 10+ years 5

6. Skills analysis

Please read each statement carefully, note that some have TWO components.

Skills areas	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
(A) Research Skills and Techniques – Are you competent to demonstrate:		
1. the ability to recognise problems.	2	1
2. both original , and critical thinking.	2	1
3. knowledge of recent advances within Leather Technology.	2	1
4. the ability to both critically analyse and evaluate one's findings.	2	1
5. an ability to both document and report progress.	2	1
(B) Research Environment – Are you competent in:		
1. showing a broad understanding of the context, in which research takes place.	2	1
2. demonstrating appreciation of good research practice at FAL.	2	1
3. understanding both workplace health and safety issues.	2	1
4. understanding of both processes for evaluating and costing.	2	1
5. justifying both principles and experimental techniques used in one's own research.	2	1
(C) Research Management – Are you competent in:		
1. applying effective project management.	2	1
2. collation of information through the effective use of appropriate resources.	2	1
3. both identifying and accessing appropriate bibliographical resources for information.	2	1
4. using information technology appropriately for both, recording and presenting information.	2	1
(D) Personal Effectiveness – Are you competent in:		
1. demonstrating the ability to both learn and acquire knowledge.	2	1
2. being both, innovative and original in one's approach to research.	2	1

3. demonstrating both flexibility and open-mindedness .	2	1
4. both self-awareness and the ability to identify own training needs .	2	1
5. demonstrating both self-discipline and motivation .	2	1
6. showing both initiative and work independently .	2	1
(E) Communication Skills – Are you competent in:		
1. both writing clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, e.g. progress reports, published documents, thesis.	2	1
2. constructively defending research outcomes at an audience.	2	1
3. promoting the public understanding of one’s research field.	2	1
4. effectively facilitate the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities.	2	1
5. presenting one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews.	2	1
(F) Networking and Teamworking - Are you competent in:		
1. both developing and maintaining co-operative networks.	2	1
2. fostering relationships with colleagues and peers, within FAL.	2	1
3. both working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams.	2	1
4. both giving and receiving feedback.	2	1
(G) Career Management - Are you competent in:		
1. appreciating both the need for and showing commitment to continued professional personal development.	2	1
2. both taking ownership for and managing one's career progression.	2	1
3. setting both realistic and achievable career goals.	2	1

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

This questionnaire is designed for the Managers at Feltex Automotive Leathers.

This questionnaire is designed to find out a few things about yourself and the Leather Technicians employed at FAL. Please answer the questions truthfully.

(Please circle in the relevant number)

PERSONAL DATA

1. What is your gender?
 - Male 1
 - Female 2

2. To which of following Age groups do you belong?
 - 25-30 1
 - 31-35 2
 - 36-40 3
 - 41-50 4
 - 50+ 5

3. Which of the following describes the department in which you work?
 - Retan 1
 - Cutting 2
 - Finishing 3
 - Marketing 4
 - R&D 5

4. Which of following BEST describes your job category?
 - Management 1
 - Leather Technician 2
 - Technical (hourly) 3
 - Administrative Support 4
 - Foreman 5

5. How long have you worked for this present establishment?
 - 3 months - 1 year 1
 - 1 - 3 years 2
 - 4 - 6 years 3
 - 7 - 10 years 4
 - 10+ years 5

6. Skills analysis

Please read each statement carefully, note that some have TWO components.

Skills areas	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
(A) Research Skills and Techniques – Are Leather Technicians competent in demonstrating:		
1. the ability to recognise problems.	2	1
2. both original , and critical thinking.	2	1
3. knowledge of recent advances within Leather Technology.	2	1
4. the ability to both critically analyse and evaluate one's findings.	2	1
5. an ability to both document and report progress.	2	1
(B) Research Environment – Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. showing a broad understanding of the context, in which research takes place.	2	1
2. demonstrating appreciation of good research practice at FAL.	2	1
3. understanding both workplace health and safety issues.	2	1
4. understanding of both processes for evaluating and costing .	2	1
5. justifying both principles and experimental techniques used in one's own research.	2	1
(C) Research Management – Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. applying effective project management.	2	1
2. collation of information through the effective use of appropriate resources.	2	1
3. both identifying and accessing appropriate bibliographical resources for information.	2	1
4. using information technology appropriately for both, recording and presenting information.	2	1
(D) Personal Effectiveness – Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. demonstrating ability to both learn and acquire knowledge.	2	1

2. being both, innovative and original in one's approach to research.	2	1
3. demonstrating both flexibility and open-mindedness .	2	1
4. both self-awareness and the ability to identify own training needs.	2	1
5. demonstrating both self-discipline and motivation .	2	1
6. showing both initiative and work independently .	2	1
(E) Communication Skills – Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. both writing clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, e.g. progress reports, published documents, thesis.	2	1
2. constructively defending research outcomes at an audience.	2	1
3. promoting the public understanding of one's research field.	2	1
4. effectively facilitate the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities.	2	1
5. presenting one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews.	2	1
(F) Networking and Team working - Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. both developing and maintaining co-operative networks.	2	1
2. fostering relationships with colleagues and peers, within FAL.	2	1
3. both working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams.	2	1
4. both giving and receiving feedback.	2	1
(G) Career Management - Are Leather Technicians competent in:		
1. appreciating both the need for and showing commitment to continued professional personal development.	2	1
2. both taking ownership for and managing one's career progression.	2	1
3. set both realistic and achievable career goals.	2	1

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.